KALMYK AND KHALKHA ETHNOGRAPHICA
IN GÁBOR BÁLINT OF SZENTKATOLNA’S MANUSCRIPTS
(1871–1873)
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The Hungarian (Székely) Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna (1844–1913) was one of the first researchers of Kalmyk and Khalkha vernacular language, folklore and ethnography. His valuable records are written in a very accurate transcription and include the specimens of Kalmyk and Khalkha spoken languages, folklore material and ethnographic narratives, and a comparative grammar of western and eastern Mongolian languages. Bálint’s manuscripts had not been released until recent years when Ágnes Birtalan published his Comparative Grammar in 2009 and the Kalmyk corpus with a comprehensive analysis in 2011.

The present article aims to give an introduction to Bálint’s ethnographic materials recorded among the Kalmyks (1871–1872) and Khalkhas (1873). Despite the similar economic and cultural milieu the two ethnic groups lived in, there is considerable difference between the Kalmyk and Khalkha text corpora. Besides presenting and systematising Bálint’s ethnographic material, I shall try to clarify the reason why this significant divergence emerges between the two text corpora. Specimens of a particular phase of the wedding ceremony are represented as examples from both text corpora.

Key words: Mongol dialects, Kalmyk, ethnography of the 19th-century Mongols, Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna, fieldwork.

During the past few years I have been dealing with Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna’s (1844–1913) unpublished manuscript heritage concerning his records of the Mongolian vernacular and published his Kalmyk material (Birtalan 2011) and his com-

1 Nyugati mongol (Kálmik) szövegek [Western Mongolian (Kalmyk) texts]. (184 pages), No.: M. Nyelvtud. 4/109; Bálint Gábor: Keleti mongol (khalkha) szövegek [Bálint, Gábor: Eastern Mongolian (Khalkha) texts]. (88 pages), No.: Ms. 1379/2; A Romanized Grammar of the East- and West-Mongolian Languages. With Popular Chrestomat[ies] of Both Dialects. (222 pages), No. 1: 81, No. 2: Ms. 1379/1. All these manuscripts are kept in the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

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parative grammar of western and eastern Mongolian spoken languages (Birtalan 2009). The Khalkha manuscript is under elaboration and is expected to be issued in the nearest future. Besides, I have published detailed analyses of some of Bálint’s unique materials, among others the so-called Black Book of the Holy Chingis Khan (Birtalan 2012b) and records connected to problems of the religious identity of the Mongols in the 19th century (Birtalan 2012a).

In my previous studies I have collected and reissued information about Bálint’s life and his research concerning the Mongols on the basis of studies by Lajos Gyula Nagy, György Kara, Lajos György, Jenő Zágoni (for references and detailed bibliography cf. Birtalan 2009 and 2011), here I shall not go into the details of these matters. In the present article I am going to introduce only the Ethnographica in Bálint’s Kalmyk and Khalkha records. The choice of the topic of my presentation was dedicated to the event of “Mongolian Studies towards the 21st Century. Hungaro–Korean–Mongolian Joint Conference. 3–4 July 2013. Budapest” (organised by the Department of Inner Asian Studies of Eötvös Loránd University and the Department of Mongolian Studies of Hankuk University for Foreign Studies). Many of the Mongolian and Korean participants of the conference have been interested in the historical ethnography of Mongolian ethnic groups or have carried out field research among Mongols investigating their material culture. In order to make the international public of the conference and the readers of Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae acquainted with Bálint’s achievements, I offer a detailed survey of Bálint’s records dealing with ethnographic subjects in a classical sense. Simultaneously, I seek answers to the questions why exactly these issues of human life attracted Bálint’s interest and what conditions determined the subjects he recorded.

A Brief Introduction to the Circumstances of Bálint’s Field Research

Gábor Bálint of Szentkatolna’s research journey to Turkic and Mongolian speaking peoples of Russia and further to Mongolia began in the summer of 1871 and he arrived back to Hungary in the winter of 1874 (in detail see Birtalan 2009, pp. xii–xv). During this research trip his main endeavour was to study and record Turkic and Mongolian vernacular languages, explicitly: “… to study language branches to be

2 Those who are interested in such matters as Bálint’s life, career, his conflicts with the Hungarian academic circles and particularly with some prominent scholars on the Hungarian Urheimat and language contacts, or his controversial, ambiguous ideas about the kin of Hungarians (both of the people and the language) are kindly requested to consult the above-mentioned publications and their references. Cf. also the Internet article by Attila Rákos: Szentkatolnától Mongóliáig és vissza [From Szentkatolna to Mongolia and back again] at http://www.nyest.hu/hirek/szentkatolnato-mongoliag-es-vissza.


4 The studies of the team of the Department of Inner Asian Studies concerning the Mongols’ nomadic culture are supported by a project of the Hungarian Scientific Fund (OTKA); No. 100613 (project-leader: Ágnes Birtalan).
traced as they exist in the folk’s speech and record the possibly rich material from this very folk tongue …" as he explained his efforts (Bálint 1871, p. 245; Birtalan 2009, p. xii). To achieve his goals and satisfy the expectations of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences and especially his main patron’s, János Fogarasi’s (1801–1878), he started to learn the spoken language in the field as quickly as possible. Within a few months he was wholly aware of the grammar and vocabulary of any language. As I already mentioned in my previous studies discussing Bálint’s methodology, his main basis of learning and researching among the Kalmyks was a school and foster home in Astrakhan, i.e. an educational institution, similarly to the working milieu in Kazan among the Christianised Tatars. He continuously communicated with school boys and teachers, but occasionally also with various people who arrived in Astrakhan, and at the market called Kalmyk Bazaar and spoke various dialects of Kalmyk.

“It was also easy to meet the Kalmyk folk, as many of the parents and relatives of the youngsters learning here arrived at the foster home to visit [them] on one hand, and on the other hand I also had the opportunity to meet Kalmyks who came to purchase [goods] or for work in Astrakhan frequently. Furthermore, I went several times to a Kalmyk Bazaar located one mile from Astrakhan on the right side of Volga, which the Kalmyks use to purchase their cattle and livestock under the supervision of the Government, and where the Kalmyk temple and priests are.”

Bálint promptly learnt the spoken language and recorded texts in order to demonstrate the characteristics of the vernacular variety of Kalmyk. He left Astrakhan for St. Petersburg in May 1872. After more than half a year in St. Petersburg and a long hesitation about the continuation of his research trip to the Mongols in Inner Asia, he finally set out on a journey in February 1873. The method proven among the Tatars and Kalmyks was changed in Urga. Bálint did not explain why he did not (could not?) visit a school and work among the school-boys. During his almost four months’ stay in Urga he lived in the Russian consulate and did not visit either the famous

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5 “… tanulmányozni a kijelölt nyelvágakat úgy, a mint azok a nép ajkán élnek és lehető bő nyelvanyagit gyűjteni szorosan a népnyelvből …” (Bálint 1875, p. 4). Here and further I follow Bálint’s spelling without adjusting his sentences to today’s orthography.

6 Here it must be mentioned that Bálint started to learn Kalmyk parallel with the language of the Christianised Tatars already during his stay (June–September 1871) in Kazan (Bálint 1871, pp. 244–245).

7 For the revised edition of Bálint’s Kazan Tatar materials see Berta (1988). Bálint is popular among the Tatars, even a Wikipedia article is devoted to him and his research on the Tatar language: http://tt.wikipedia.org/wiki/Габор_Балинт.

8 “Magával a khálymik néppel való érintkezésem is élég könnyű volt, minthogy részint a tanuló ifjak szülei és rokonai közül említett növendébe látogatásra többen eljártak, részint Asztrakhan városában minden pillanatban találkozhatám a vásárlás vagy munkára jött khálymikokkal, azután meg eljártam az Asztrakhanhántól egy mérföldnyire, a Volga folyó jobbjának és csak khálymik bazarra, a hol a khálymikok barmakat és jóságákat szokták a kormánytól rendelt ellenőrizet mellett eladni, s a hol a khálymik templom és papság is van” (Bálint 1875, p. 13).
sights, or the herdsme n’s yurts in the countryside. It is obvious from his notes how in-
fluential on his work the then Russian consul, Šišmarjov9 was. His and his wife’s hos-
pitality supported Bálint’s endeavour and was probably decisive why Bálint did not
use any opportunity to travel throughout Mongolia or even in the vicinity of Urga.
Bálint’s recollection of the consulate and consul Šišmarjov gives additional valuable
information on the contemporary Russian–Mongolian relations and the activity of
the consul.

“Outside the town a mounted Cossack came to meet me and escorted me
to the precincts of the Russian consulate. In the yard of the compound
fenced round with planks, the secretary of the consulate I. V. Paderin10
welcomed me in English and led me to the room assigned to me. I gave
Bold [Bálint: Bolot]11 a little purse with silver 10 kopek pieces worth
one and a half rubles. He thanked it with the “Be happy!” greeting and
started back for Khüree [Bálint: Khüren],12 which they call Urga in
Mongolian, with a joyful face. I got out my pulp wash basin and washed
myself for the first time in a week, then put on my grey suit bought from
Budapest,13 for I took no black suit with me as it is hated by the Mon-
gols. When I had a hearty meal from the snack sent to me by the secre-
tary, I went upstairs to the consul who welcomed me warmly and told
me he had been instructed by the Asian Department [Russ. Aziatskij De-
partament]14 to give me board and lodging while I was there because
I could get no accommodation or food in Urga.15 Soon the consul’s wife
Maria Nikolaevna, a blond woman of thirty, appeared and her hus-
band introduced me to her. The most respectful address among Russians, both
men and women, is to say the person’s Christian name and the name of
the father with the suffix meaning N’s son or daughter. Maria N iko-
laevna (pron. [in Hung.] Nyikolayevna) is thus Maria, the daugh-
ter of Nicholas. The consul Jakob Parmenteевич Shishmarev [correctly: Jakov
Parfjonovič Šišmarjov] as the surname indicates is of Mongolian origin,
sparks Mongolian and is a practical man. His secretary studied Manchu-
Mongolian and Chinese as well as law at St. Petersburg University. The
consul’s wife is the daughter of a rich doctor in Irkutsk who finished

9 In her detailed account, Edinarhova pointed out the use of the consul’s father’s name
(Russ. otčestvo) in various forms in the sources, among others as Bálint used it: Parfent’evič (Edi-
10 Paderin “služil ispravljajuščim dela sekretarja i dragomana konsul’stvav Urge”; he be-
came famous as one of the first explorers of Karakorum. Cf. Us, Larisa Borisovna: Zarubežne
11 A horseman hired by Bálint in order to escort him from the boundary of Mongolia to
Urga (Bálint 2005a and 2005b passim).
12 The capital city had a number of names, this refers to Mong. Kūriyen, Yeke Kūriyen
‘Monastery, Great Monastery’ etc. For the history and names of the city, cf. Teleki (2011).
13 This name-variant of the Hungarian capital city became officially accepted in 1872.
14 A department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Empire, founded in 1819.
secondary school, learnt French and English but for lack of practice forgot both. She called me Mister Bálint in the English way; her husband addressed me as Gabriel Andreevich. While we were conversing, the consul’s wife brought a samovar to the table and after drinking a few cups of fine tea, we parted. I made my bed with the bedding I had bought from Kazan and slept till morning” (Bálint 2005b, p. 52).

Bálint’s informant, the 45-year-old Lama Yondonǰamc was recommended to him by J. P. Šišmarjov. Most of their meetings took place probably in the building of the consulate where Bálint lived. In his comprehensive report on his journey Bálint evaluated his Lama informant as follows:

“Upon arrival in Urga, I contracted a widely travelled and wandered lower-ranking hence married Lama (that is, priest) aged 45 to teach me, because among the xar xün [Bálint khara khun] (black people), i. e. the common people, only office administrators could undertake tuition, but their official engagements would not have let them devote me the time I needed.

My Lama tutor called Yondonǰamc [Bálint Jandén Dsamcza, cf. Khal. Yondonǰamc] had little to do. Well-known for his fluency in speaking, he could not write in Mongolian but only in Tibetan, for the Mongolian clergy find it beyond them to write, or even speak, in the language of their native folk. Money, however, loosened his tongue, and I was glad that he had not been concerned with anything else but the sacred Tibetan language and writs, for in this way he did not know the language of the Mongolian religious books which is rather well known through Kowalewski’s dictionary and could teach me the vernacular.

Moving next to the Russian consulate, this lama could visit me twice a day upon my request” (Bálint 1875, p. 14).

In his Grammar Bálint added the following on his Lama:

“During 155 days I did nothing else than writing down phonetically all things my lama or other persons, whom he called to me, were able to dictate to me. … I must remark that my lama was no literator [sic! perhaps ‘educated, erudite’] but cleverer [sic! recte: cleverer] and more experienced than many of the learned ones”

(Birtalan 2009, p. 5; in Bálint’s manuscript, p. iv).

From the above short evaluations it is clear why the Khalkha material differs considerably from the Kalmyk. Even if the Lama was a “black”, wandering monk, and was concerned with worldly matters as well, he explained the rites of passage (wedding and funeral) from his Buddhist viewpoint, but was acquainted with the characteristics of the nomadic way of life as well.

16 On the current works about Šišmarjov’s achievements as the most influential person of Russian politics in Mongolia, cf. Birtalan (2012a).

The Kalmyk and Khalkha Records: Language and Content

The Kalmyk and Khalkha materials and the *Grammar* compiled on the basis of both records reflect the vernacular varieties of the languages. When I worked on the elaboration of the Kalmyk texts with T. Bordžanova and B. Gorjava (in Budapest in 2011), we tried to identify the dialectal features of the records. According to Bordžanova the majority of the Kalmyk texts reflect the peculiarities of the Torgūd dialect of the Kalmyk. Introducing Bálint’s unedited texts Kara has already mentioned that the records from Urga seem to belong to a Western Khalkha variety of the Mongolian (Khalkha) proper (Kara 1962, p. 163). Here arises the question whether Bálint’s main informant came from a western part of Mongolia where the spoken tongue has some characteristics of Western Mongolian Oirad, or Bálint’s acquaintance with Kalmyk (a Western-Mongolian variety) influenced his transcription system. This fact does not detract from the value of Bálint’s achievements, but after a careful study the linguistic properties of the Khalkha (Western-Khalkha?) texts could probably be ascertained more accurately.

Concerning the content of the records, the quality and quantity of particular parts (cf. below) are unbalanced, but most of them are indisputably unique and worth studying. Both text corpora reveal Bálint’s systematic conception to demonstrate the language and its cultural context most diversely. The vernacular language “speaks” in a lifelike manner through some basic dialogues and with the most authentic terms and expressions of folklore genres and ethnographic narratives.

Supposedly, Bálint had a lot more records and materials than the ones included in his manuscripts kept in the Department of Manuscripts and Rare Books of the Library of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences which are only systematic selections from his material already arranged according to a “classical” way of introducing a language and its speakers’ folk tradition. Concerning both text corpora, his materials consist of the following:

i) Dialogues – Bálint compiled them with the purpose of demonstrating the basic conversational types, i.e. the basis for a future conversation booklet.

ii) Folklore texts – Bálint paid special attention to record almost all the main genres of the Mongolian folklore.

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17 The Kalmyk transcription encloses some elements of Written Oirad, as Bálint, being acquainted with the Kalmyk and Oirad “clear script”, used also the written variants of the texts dictated to him (Birtalan 2009, pp. xviii–xix).

18 On the various dialects of Kalmyk with rich reference material, see Blässing (2003).

19 It is striking, however, that he did not record longer epics, such as the famous *Jangar* (Kalm. *Jangγr*) epics among the Kalmyks or any other text from the rich heritage of other Mongolian ethnic groups in Urga. Bálint only noted down a *Geser* epic variant (in written form the text was published by Isaac Jakob Schmidt in 1836); cf. “I read the whole fable of Geser Khān with my lama and transcribed it in the spoken language” (Birtalan 2009, p. 5; Preface to the *Grammar*, p. iv); unfortunately this manuscript has been lost.
iii) Ethnographic records – texts concerning the folk life – both material and spiritual cultures – are thoroughly represented in Bálint’s material (in detail cf. below).

Bálint himself summed up the circumstances of his recording ethnographic material (hereafter Ethnographica) among the Kalmyks as follows:

“The last passage of my collection comprises the articles demonstrating the main features of the Kalmyk life, written by Muchka Baldir, the best student of the upper level at secondary school and my teacher, the surgeon for me for [some] presents and the teaching help I offered the Kalmyk pupils at secondary school in learning Latin, Greek and French languages” (Bálint 1875, p. 12).

Later in the introduction to his Grammar he mentioned again his intention of recording ethnographic material as follows:

“I directed my chief attention to matters concerning the customs and traditions of the Mongols; therefore I wrote down the customs and ceremonies about birth, marriage and death, which are given in part II of the present grammar” (Birtalan 2009, p. 5; in Bálint’s manuscript p. iv).

In fact he included into the Chrestomathy part of the Grammar only a minor part of his Kalmyk material concerning the ethnographic subjects, but almost everything from the Khalkha records (for the detailed contents see below).

The brief Kalmyk ethnographic surveys hold significant information on various aspects of the social and cultural environment and provide appropriate supplementary material to other well-known reports on the Kalmyks noted down by earlier travellers and researchers (such as P. S. Pallas, B. Bergman, P. Nebol’sin, I. A. Žiteckij, K. I. Kostenkov, Ja. P. Dubrov, Ü. Dušan etc.) and later ethnographic and folklore publications based on systematic field work (K. Erenǰänä, U. E. Erdniev, T. G. Bordžanova, Je. E. Habunova). As Bálint’s Khalkha manuscript is currently under elaboration, I have not collected all the possible reference and parallel materials, but the thoroughgoing monograph on Khalkha ethnography at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries edited by Badamxatan will be one of the main works in reconstructing the cultural background of Bálint’s records (Badamxatan 1987).

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20 “Gyűjteményem záradékát képezik a khálymik életet főbb vonásaiban ismertető czikkek, melyeket a felgymnasiumi tanulók legkitevőbbje Mucska Baldir és tanítóm a sebész írtak számmá-ra ajándék, de azon segítség fejében is, melyet én a gymnasiuim középiskolának a latin, görög és franczia nyelv tanulásánál nyujték” (Bálint 1875, p. 12). On Baldrīn Mūčka cf. Introduction in Birtalan (2011, p. 14).

21 All these references are given and the accounts are analysed in Birtalan (2011, pp. 137 – 167).
According to the traditional presentation of the material and spiritual spheres of cultures the following typology can be established on the basis of the contents of Bálint’s records.

i) Nomadic way of life, i.e. working processes that include: nomadising, the way of pasturing the livestock, milking and preparing milk products, shearing the sheep and hunting with birds (Birtalan 2011, pp. 160–162). All these aspects of the daily life of a nomadic community were recorded among the Kalmyks and are missing from the Khalkha material. All these narrations are concise masterpieces on the way of life containing valuable terminology of the 19th-century Kalmyk vernacular. E.g. the chapter on Hunting with Birds is one of the rare descriptions of this unique custom maintained only by the Kalmyks and unfortunately lost in Mongolia towards the 20th century (only surviving among the Kazaks in Bayan-Ölgii province). Bálint’s account is an invaluable material that seems to be the only early record on hunting with birds in the Kalmyk language.

ii) Customs of various life phases (rites of passage) of the Mongols. Both manuscripts contain records on wedding and funeral. Bálint accurately noted them down again with lots of important terms (Birtalan 2011, pp. 139–148). An account of the customs connected to childbirth as one of the rites of passage, is preserved only in the Chrestomathy part of the Grammar and is not included in the Khalkha manuscript. The Kalmyks narrated to Bálint also about other aspects of their life, namely the festive competitions (the well-known Nādam among all the Mongolian ethnic groups: wrestling, horse racing, archery), stealing horses from the neighbouring Turkic population – as a “custom” practised by Kalmyks even in the 19th century. In all probability this is an emic distinction made by Bálint’s informants who ranged this activity as a kind of competition in bravery (in detail, cf. Birtalan 2011, pp. 148–149). A very remarkable description of a legal process, the Kalm. šaxa ‘the way of taking an oath in the case of stealing’ is well documented in written sources and travelogues, but as far as I know, Bálint’s narrative is the only orally transmitted variant of the custom in the native Kalmyk language.

The Typology of Narratives on Kalmyk and Khalkha Ethnography

Bálint’s text-corpora, as a unique ethnographic source for the 19th-century Mongols, contain the following aspects of life:

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23 For a recent fieldwork based study on the Nādam, see Birtalan (2006).
24 The way of this unique judgement on horse-nustlers is carried out as a juramentum revelatorium. Heuschert reviewed the written Mongolian and Kalmyk sources and many travelogues that mention this custom (Heuschert 1996, pp. 49–83), but Bálint’s material is again the only narrative in a native tongue reflecting the elaborate terminology of the process.

**Ethnographica Kalmykica**

Nomadic Way of Life

- About how the Kalmyks Pasture their Livestock (Bálint Xal’imīyūd yayajī małān xārūldg tuskī’ī, Kalm. Xal’myūd yāj małān xārūldg tusk n’) Manuscript pp. 149–153 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 154–156).
- About the Milk of the Domestic Animals of the Kalmyk(s) (Manuscript Xal’imigīn małīn üsūnā tuskī) Manuscript pp. 154–161 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 156–158).
- About how the Kalmyks Shear the Sheep (Bálint Man’i xal’imīyūd yayajī xōiyān xāҷīledek (kīrādīk) tuskī, Kalm. Maŋā xal’myūd yāj xōgān xāӠīldg (kīrʤ) tusk) Manuscript pp. 162–164 (Birtalan 2011, pp. 158–159).

Rites of passage

- The wedding customs of the Mongols (Bálint Mongol ulūsēn ekēn abčī gērlekkēn yoso, Khal. Mongol ulusēn exner avčī gerlexsēn yos) Manuscript Khal. pp. 52–58.

**Ethnographica Mongolica**

Rites of passage

- The wedding customs of the Mongols (Bálint Mongol ulūsēn ekēn abčī gērlekkēn yoso, Khal. Mongol ulusēn exner avčī gerlexsēn yos) Manuscript Khal. pp. 52–58.

The following parts are included in the Chrestomathy of Bálint’s Grammar, for teaching purposes and as illustrative sample texts for someone who wishes to learn how “to speak to the open-hearted people of Tschingis khan” – as Bálint explained his intention of compiling the Grammar and the Chrestomathy (Birtalan 2009, p. 13; Manuscript p. xiii). The Chrestomathy of the Grammar includes the following texts with Bálint’s English translation.

[Mongolian customs] ............................................................................................. 158
1. Monghol ulosin yoso (Mongol ulsin yos) – The custom of the Mongolian people [birth] .................................................................................................................. 158
2. Monghol ulosin ek’ener abtschi gerelk’eîn yoso (Mongol ulsin exner avč gerlexîn yos) – The nuptial ceremony of the Mongolians .................................................. 161
3. Ük’öșöñ k’üni buyin (Üksen xûni buyan) – Funeral ceremonies .................... 171

Khal’imâgin malîn üsünâi tuski (Xal’mgîn malîn üsnǟ tusk) – The milk of the domestic animals of the Khalmik(s) ................................................................. 205
Gûnä üsün (Günǟ üsn) – Mare’s milk ................................................................. 210
Khöineî (khoinal) üsün (Xûnä üsn) – Ewe-milk ............................................... 212

**Sample Texts from Kalmyk and Khalkha Ethnographica**

One cannot overemphasise the significance of Bálint’s records as the first information on the Mongolian customs written down in the native vernacular of 19th-century Kalmyk and (Western) Khalkha. These brief accounts describe the essential elements of Mongolian folk life and parallel with it contain the terminology embedded into the narrations, and this point brings Bálint’s field research into prominence. Here, I chose two short fragments from both collections concerning the probably most important phase of human life, the wedding customs, to demonstrate the value of Bálint’s material. Both the Kalmyk and Khalkha materials include quite long narrations about marriage, precisely presenting the phases and the long-lasting wedding process starting from the proposal, through the complex description of the wedding up to the integration of the new wife into her husband’s family and even to the possibilities of divorce. As mentioned above, Bálint’s sources of information were different: among the Kalmyks lay people less concerned with religiosity narrated about their life, while among the Khalkhas the main source of information was a monk and partly some other people he invited to be at Bálint’s disposal. Even if Bálint emphasised that Yondojamc was a “black lama” with worldly views and intentions, his attitude was religious and regarded the world from a Buddhist viewpoint.
I have dealt in detail with the Kalmyk wedding process in the book devoted to Bálint’s Kalmyk material and discussed it in the wider context of other contemporary sources (on the basis of Russian, German and other accounts and travelogues) and later native (emic) field reports and analyses. The Kalmyk records on wedding were not included in the Chrestomathy part of Bálint’s Grammar. Concerning the Khalkha records, Bálint not only included them in the Chrestomathy of the Grammar and translated them into English, but attached some explanations to the Khalkha customs. He found surprising similarities with the customs of the Roman Empire on the basis of István Schönwisner’s Latin text book.25

Fragment from “The Wedding of the Kalmyks (Oirats)”
(Bálint Xal’imgīn (őirādīn) ger abalyan, Kalm.26 Xal’mgīn (őrdīn) ger awlyn)27

“[144] At night a sheep is slaughtered in the lad’s father’s yurt and offered to the fire.28 The maid is called to come to the lad’s father’s yurt, where a white rug (Bálint širdēg, Kalm. širdg) is laid at the door.29
[145] The maid is set down on the felt rug, a curtain is pulled in front of her and she is given a bowl with fat cut into small pieces (Bálint bičixān bičixānār utuluksun āyata ēkō, Kalm. bičēn, bičknār utisn ēgtā ēk). Thereafter the man who was supposed to touch her and her goods [for the first time] makes her bow (Bálint, Kalm. ber mörgūl-)30 as follows. That man takes the maid’s head [and says]:
– [You] bow to the Buddha. – He makes the maid bow and she throws a piece of fat into the fire. Thereafter:
– Live well with your husband!31 – He makes the maid bow again and [she] throws a piece of fat into the fire. Thereafter:
– Respect your husband’s parents, elder and younger brothers and relatives! – He makes her bow again. Thereafter, when the maid arrives at the lad’s yurt, some wives send the little children and boys to say: “Her [i.e. wife’s] hair will be prepared” (Bálint ēsii xagāl-, Kalm. ēs xayal-).32 The maid’s hair is plaited into two [parts] and the decoration34

25 The proper use of Schönwisner’s Latin textbook for secondary school testifies Bálint’s competence in classical Latin language and culture.
26 Kalm. = Reference to contemporary Kalmyk.
28 Bálint yal tā-, Kalm. yal tā- ‘fire offering’; this phase of the Kalmyk wedding is well-documented in the literature, e.g. cf. Batmaev (2008, pp. 224–226).
29 Bálint ūden xorondu, Kalm. ūdn xōnd; this place is significant as the location of sacred and other important actions.
31 Here lit. the son-in-law (Bálint körāi) expression is used.
32 Bálint kōbūn lit. “lad”.

is put on it. Thereafter the pillows are joined\textsuperscript{35} and they both go to bed together.”

Fragment from “The Wedding of the Khalkhas” (Bálint\textsuperscript{36} Mongol ulus\textsuperset{ē}n ekener ab\textsuperset{ē}i gerell\textsuperset{kēn yoso (Khalkha Mongol uls\textsuperset{i}n exner aw\textsuperset{ē}i gerlex\textsuperset{i}n yoso) “The custom of wedding of the Mongols”)

“They make the girl enter, seat her at the left side of the fire near the door and give her mutton chop (rib) and mutton rump (Bálint\textsuperscript{37} xonin\textsuperset{ē} āp\textsuperset{ē}tē ūca, Khalkha xonin\textsuperset{i} āw\textsuperset{ē}tī ē uc), brandy and airak (Bálint ārek\textsuperset{'}, ārek, Khalkha arix, airag): then a man of the girl’s party harmonizing (Bálint\textsuperscript{ebel, Khalkha iw\textsuperset{ē}l) with both the bridegroom and bride (girl) divides the girl’s hair (Bálint usēg ‘xayalji, Khalkha usēg xagal) and (so) makes her a wife. After this the hair dividing man makes the bride pay honors (Bálint mōrg\textsuperset{-}, Khalkha mōrg\textsuperset{ū}l-) to the god, fire, (5) to the parents-in-law and elder brothers-in-law. While so doing he makes her kneel upon her spread outskirts (Bálint xormo\textsuperset{ē}g ne dēpsi\textsuperset{jī, Khalkha xormoīg n’ dewsūlī). While the bride pays honors, the parents-in-law and elder brother[s]-in-law make invocations (but commonly) instead of them a good invocator performs this duty.”

Bálint’s note:

“(5) The hair dividing as well as the honor paying after the Oirat usage takes place not in the house of the bride’s parents, but in the new house of the bridegroom and it seems to me that my Mongolian Lama has related this part not in its due place. The honor paying or we might say adoration corresponding to the spousals consists in the following act: the bride kneeling before the fire in the bridegroom’s new house (tent) holds a small cup with pieces of mutton fat and while bowing says after the hair dividing man: ‘I adore the god!’ and throws a piece of fat into the fire; ‘Mayst thou live in peace with your husband!’ says the hair dividing man and the bride making a bow throws again a piece of fat into the fire: ‘Honor thy parents-in-law and brothers-in-law!’ and the bride bowing throws once more a piece of fat into the fire. Cf. the old Roman usage … 7) Lanēis dein vittis ornabat Sponsa postes aedium, et adipe lupino vel suillo unguebat ad avertendum fascinationem, Compendium Antiquitatum Romanorum Ab. St. Schoenwisner Budae 1821.”

\textsuperscript{35} Bálint\textsuperscript{ dere neīlāl-, cf. Khal. der nīlīl- lit. “to join the pillows” is a taboo-expression for sleeping together (used not only in the wedding terminology, but generally for woman–man relationship).

\textsuperscript{36} Khalkha-Manuscript pp. 55–56; Birtalan (2011, p. 165), Grammar-Manuscript p. 146.

\textsuperscript{37} I inserted the Khalkha terminology from the Khalkha-Manuscript, because its transcription is more elaborated than that of the Grammar-Manuscript.
Conclusion

Although Bálint travelled throughout Asia even after his first research journey to the Tatars and Mongols (1871–1874) as the participant in the expeditions of Count Béla Széchenyi (1837–1918) and Count Jenő Zichy (1837–1906), on the basis of his working methodology (cf. above) and letters to Fogarasi (in detail Birtalan 2009) Bálint seemed not to be a “real” field researcher. As has been demonstrated above, he rather stayed in cities (in Kazan, Astrakhan and Urga) and worked with a limited group of informants (school boys, teachers, a lama and to some extent with people who arrived from the countryside) instead of going to the field and seeking for more herdsmen and peasants. This fact does not reduce his immense achievements in studying the vernacular and recording the first information about vernacular (folk) culture in the native tongue; however, it demonstrates why the contents of his records offer limited data in some respect. Examining his ethnographic material in the context of later field research issues, Bálint’s data are correct, and if the informant seemed “to fail”, Bálint himself questioned his reliability (cf. Bálint’s note to the wedding processes discussed above).

Concerning the subjects of the Ethnographica, Bálint tried to create meticulously the context of vernacular culture for the spoken language material. He came from Transylvania and was acquainted with the Hungarian and Székely folk culture, so he could correlate his field experience among nomadic people with his native milieu experienced from his childhood. However, his main informants’ knowledge was limited for various reasons, the Kalmyks were mostly young (cf. their simple language usage), his lama informant tried to explain the phenomena of Mongolian Buddhism as he comprehended it from the periphery of the clergy (from the viewpoint of a half lay, half clerical person).

Nonetheless, Bálint was able to build the image of lay and religious Mongols with the help of his informants’ material, and a lay Mongol’s life and vernacular culture is remarkably reflected in the Kalmyk and Mongol Ethnographica.

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